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Book Review: *Ecology and Behavior of Chickadees  
and Titmice: An Integrated Approach* Edited by Ken  
A. Otter

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**Ecology and Behavior of Chickadees and Titmice: An Integrated Approach.** Edited by Ken A. Otter. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. xxiv + 319 pp. Maps, figures, tables, references, index. \$125.00 cloth.

The family Paridae (comprised primarily of the chickadees and titmice of North America and the tits of Eurasia) is among the most familiar and best-studied of all bird families. Widely distributed across much of North America, with several species represented in the Great Plains, this group of endearing little birds is familiar to anyone who feeds birds in the yard or shops for holiday cards. David Lack and other European ornithologists began studies of great tits (*Parus major*) in England, the Netherlands, and Belgium in the early and mid-20th century that have continued to date and are among the longest-term field studies of birds ever done. The many insights that have come from the European studies are well known to most ornithologists, but until reading this book I had not appreciated the extensive research done on the North American parids in the last 20-30 years.

As the editor emphasizes in his introduction, the appeal of parids to researchers derives from their relative tameness, allowing close approach in the field, their willingness (at least in Eurasia) to use artificial nest boxes that researchers provide, and their ability to tolerate being kept in aviaries. Perhaps not surprisingly, these birds have been the subject of numerous investigations in evolution, psychology, neuroethology, ecology, and animal behavior.

Deriving from a workshop held in 2005, this book brings together much of the work being done on chickadees and titmice in North America. Seventeen chapters by leading North American parid biologists address the neurobiology and endocrinology of spatial behavior and food caching, photoperiodism, timing of reproduction, phylogeography, hybridization, demography, dominance and fitness, vocalizations, landscape ecology, and winter social behavior. The chapters, in general well written and clearly presented, offer something to anyone interested in these topics (although most authors rarely draw parallels to taxa beyond the other parids). Those who study this group of birds or even other temperate latitude birds with similar ecology and behavior will find the book valuable.

One of the volume's stated goals is to compare the North American chickadees and titmice to the well-studied Eurasian birds, especially the great tit and blue tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) that have figured prominently in so many studies. The individual chapters succeed in doing this to varying degrees. In the concluding chapter, André Dhondt describes explicitly the behavioral and ecological differences between North American and Eurasian parids, and I found this to be the most interesting part of the book. I have always wondered how representative the work done on the bird-box-nesting European tits is of birds in general, and Dhondt points out that some of it may

not be representative of even other parids. The great and blue tits (GBT), phylogenetically, are more basal taxa, and most of the other species that have been studied (especially in North America) are more evolutionarily derived. GBT more readily use bird boxes than do the North American species, perhaps because GBT do not excavate their own cavities, and consequently studies on reproductive ecology and fitness have been easier and more numerous for GBT. The other parids are more likely to cache food and defend group territories in winter, and they have more limited song repertoires but more complex vocalizations than do the GBT. Most studies of winter social organization in parids come from the North American species, although more total papers have been published on the great tit alone than all other species combined. Clearly the message is that the great tit is really quite different from the typical North American chickadee.

This is a useful, attractive book that will be a major reference on this bird family, and the insights gained from it will likely prove to be broadly applicable across many kinds of birds. **Charles R. Brown**, *Department of Biological Sciences, University of Tulsa*.